

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

October 22, 2003

The Honorable Robert B. Zoellick
United States Trade Representative
600 17th Street, NW
Washington, DC 20508

Dear Mr. Ambassador:

We are writing regarding the U.S.-Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA) negotiations, the current round of which is going on this week in Houston. We strongly believe trade agreements should spur economic growth, promote development, and raise the standard of living in the United States and Central America. We are deeply concerned that the Administration's current proposals for CAFTA will not advance these important goals.

As you know, many of us voted in favor of both the U.S.-Chile and U.S.-Singapore FTAs, while others voted against these agreements. We all, however, agree that the Chile and Singapore FTAs should not be used as models for CAFTA. This is clearly true as it relates to the labor provisions. Using a standard of "enforce your own labor laws" is unacceptable for nations that do not incorporate internationally-recognized labor standards (rights to associate and bargain collectively, prohibitions on child labor, discrimination, and forced labor) in their laws and have a history of non-enforcement of their inadequate laws. That is precisely true in Central America, where the U.S. State Department and the International Labor Organization have repeatedly found that labor laws fall below minimal international standards.

We noted your recent announcement of a capacity building effort in the region. While educating workers and employers in Central America about their labor laws is an important activity, it is not a substitute for a fully enforceable commitment by signatories to the CAFTA to adopt and enforce in their laws the internationally-recognized labor standards. Further, cuts in the International Labor Affairs Bureau budget proposed by President Bush - from \$147 million to \$12 million - call into question any broad-based, sustained commitment the Administration may have to capacity building.

During the current negotiating round in Houston, USTR has an important opportunity to push for new labor language that addresses the serious problem of the region's lower labor standards and enforcement capacity. A properly structured CAFTA is important for garnering the broad

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bipartisan support necessary to address the difficult issues for a meaningful CAFTA and to bring benefits to the United States and Central America. We look forward to working with you to achieving such an agreement.

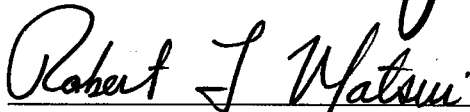
Sincerely,



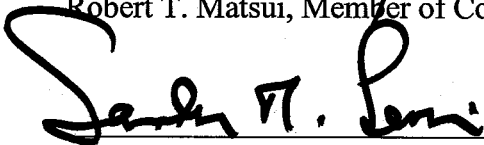
Nancy Pelosi, Member of Congress



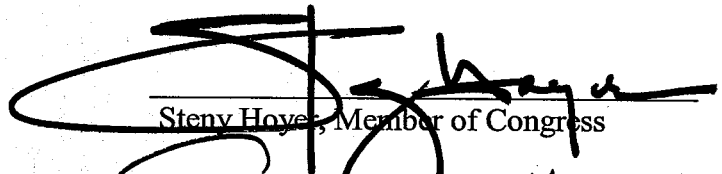
Charles B. Rangel, Member of Congress



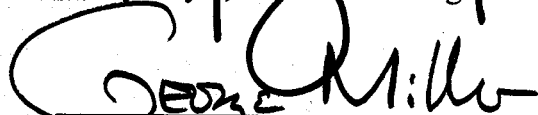
Robert T. Matsui, Member of Congress



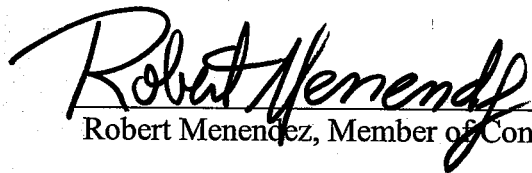
Sander M. Levin, Member of Congress



Steny Hoyer, Member of Congress



George Miller, Member of Congress



Robert Menendez, Member of Congress